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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by International Council of Psychologists, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, Make Mothers Matter International, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Council of Women of the United States, Universal Peace Federation and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

We are deeply committed to the theme of this year's Commission on the Status of Women, "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication". As at 1 November 2011, the world's population had reached 7 billion. The United Nations Population Fund forecasts continuation of population increases in the years to come. The importance of ensuring the success of rural women in their role in the eradication of poverty and hunger is explicit. Factors that prevail currently should also be considered when examining the importance of their roles in these two tasks. The migration from rural communities to urban settings in search of employment, global temperature shifts, the global recession, war and famine spreading throughout the world add further importance to their roles and increase the urgency of providing them with adequate support to maintain the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger.

Progress has been made in the awareness and attention given to the empowerment of women and achievement of human rights for women and girls since the world conferences which began in Mexico in 1975. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls on Governments to eliminate discrimination against rural women. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, though not a binding document, continues to serve as a guide on many issues related to woman's human rights. It specifically highlights the need for policies and strategies to improve the situation of rural women producers in the areas of incomes and household food security. Continued support and emphasis need to be placed in order to ensure implementation of these policies and goals, particularly in countries where women are more and more being forced into a role of the household head.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the target date established by the Millennium Declaration would be a significant step towards the empowerment of women. However, despite very positive legislation over the years, the actual plight of rural women of all ages continues to present many problems that need to be addressed. Despite variation in degrees of severity, serious problems face rural women in developed countries, developing countries and countries in transition to a market economy. Such problems include lack of access to resources, land, financing, technologies, education, training, physical and mental health services and markets, and lack of social protection measures and inheritance rights.

Currently rural women are experiencing a crisis due to the decline of rural communities caused by high unemployment rates, low wages, unpaid work, movement of rural population to cities, lack of services, lack of adequate roads and transportation, lack of technology, lack of equipment, lack of adequate and accessible health care and lack of adequate education. For example, even in countries such as Ukraine with rich soil, villages are declining and the burden frequently falls on older women. Out of 329,000 rural settlements, almost 9,000 are declining and dying. In 3,000 settlements, no children were born. Nine per cent of settlements have no children under 5 years of age. Africa and other developing regions experience an extreme lack of resources, high rates of extreme poverty and lack of human rights for rural women, exacerbated by the AIDS epidemic and climate change.

Rural areas have maintained traditional patterns of behaviour as change reaches villages more slowly. Rural women are often subservient to men and follow patriarchal normative patterns. They carry a disproportionate share of caregiving for children, the disabled and the elderly. The Secretary-General, in his statement on World Rural Women's Day, writes: "Study after study has demonstrated that rural women are pivotal to addressing hunger, malnutrition and poverty. They are the farmers and nurturers, the entrepreneurs and educators, the healers and helpers who can contribute to food security and economic growth in the world's most remote and vulnerable settings."

In view of the importance of rural women's contribution and especially in view of globalization, the economic and ecological crises as well as the crisis caused by natural disasters, we urge Governments to take immediate action in order to stop and prevent the extinction of rural communities and the massive flight of populations to urban areas, thus endangering the world's food supply and bringing about hunger and starvation.

We urge Governments to:

- Provide adequate funding in their budgets for the empowerment of rural women and rural development
- Support rural women's active participation and consultation on policies for rural well-being and development
- Address rural women's unpaid work
- Facilitate provision of resources and social protection measures
- Improve infrastructure — access to drinkable water, roads, sanitation, cooking and heating resources
- Facilitate creation of local credit unions
- Provide access to education and training
- Provide access to technology
- Facilitate access to information and communications technology
- Support non-governmental rural women's organizations in leading educational campaigns on women's empowerment and women's human rights
- Improve data collection disaggregated by sex and age and rural and urban populations for use in rural policy formulation
- Prevent climate change by developing new sources of energy and elimination of harmful emissions
- Develop a global partnership in accordance with Millennium Development Goal 8 for rural development and food security based on an open, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory trading and financial system.